

The Rainbow Door Coming Out Day

We were planning a Coming Out Day service at the UU Church in Little Rock a couple years back and one of us suggested that what we really needed was a rainbow door so that people could literally “Come Out” while we were celebrating Coming Out Day. Like most things, the idea quickly took on a life of its own. Randi Romo, the Director of the Center for Artistic Revolution, the most active GLBTQ organization in Little Rock, offered a door and the youth from her organization painted it and brought it to the church for the celebration. That service happened soon after reports of multiple GLBTQ youth suicides, and a memorial service for them run by Randi, her staff, and the youth. We had hosted that event for GLBTQ youth in the community and a few fundraisers for the organization. That Coming Out Day service was one of the most powerful and touching in which I had participated, and by the time we finished Coming Out, everyone present had gone through the door to come out as GLBT or Q or as an ally of GLBTQ people. It was an amazing show of solidarity and support, especially in a church in the mid-south region.

The next year, I asked about the door, thinking to borrow it for the Coming Out Day service. It turned out that Randi was using it on her house. So it was looking like we wouldn't have a door unless we made one, so I took a door and built a frame so it could open, and our youth painted it so we could once again have a rainbow door. I left that door at the church in Little Rock, so this year all I had was a rainbow flag to fill a doorway, but I hope you at least got the idea of coming out through the rainbow door! Perhaps next year, someone will make us a rainbow door for this service!

Now of course, one doesn't need a rainbow door to come out, but it is certainly a way of making the celebration more festive. GLBTQ folks are always coming out to new friends, family members, work colleagues and acquaintances. Fortunately, in most parts of this country it has become safer and more accepted to be out of the closet, but there still are places, situations, work environments, churches, and families in which it is far from safe or accepted to be gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, queer or even questioning. There are several nations in which it is neither safe nor accepted to be GLBTQ or to support GLBTQ persons. I am certainly glad to see this nation move toward greater acceptance, recognizing civil, human, and in several states even marriage rights of GLBTQ persons. The battle has been long and hard, and many people have died in the fight for equal rights and acceptance.

Around the world there is still so much to do, so many people afraid to come out. In fact in Uganda and several other countries, the situation has been getting worse. Christian Evangelical Missionaries from the United States have been helping to make the situation worse by preaching against homosexuality and spreading homophobia. It has been a surprise to see a developed nation like Russia become officially homophobic. Two steps forward, one step back, but at least in the United States, progress in recent years has been fairly steady with only occasional setbacks. But just as racism and sexism continue to plague the nation, albeit in more subtle ways, heterosexism and homophobia will likely continue here as well. The battle for equal rights continues.

One of the many reasons I am glad to be back in California is that it is really nice to actually see progress. I have already conducted 2 legal same-sex marriages since my return, so I am no longer breaking any laws when I celebrate the union of two persons who love each other and happen to have the same sexual equipment! Not that the laws against same-sex unions ever stopped me, but I remember feeling sad each time couples united whose marriages could not be legally recognized.

Unitarian Universalist Ministers have been supporting and conducting same-sex marriages for decades, but now several states actually recognize recent weddings as legal! I am very glad to be part of a movement that has been a leader on this issue as well as on many other human and civil right issues. Because of our stands on this and other issues, as well as our humanistic component, coming out as a Unitarian Universalist has sometimes been as risky as coming out as gay!

There are still too many companies in which unwritten rules insure that GLBTQ persons do not get the same opportunities as straights. There are still too many churches that use ambiguous Biblical passages to perpetuate prejudice against GLBTQ persons. There are still too many families in which it is not safe to come out of the closet. For many GLBTQ persons, there are still risks to coming out. Many of the persons I know who have come out have also talked about how freeing it is to share the truth about oneself with others.

So many people coming out have been surprised to find out that their families and friends are much more supportive than they expected, and that family members and friends knew the truth all along. Sometimes the hardest part of coming out is admitting to oneself that one really is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. There is still a stigma to being different, and like women and persons of color before them, GLBTQ persons are often treated like 2nd class citizens in various settings even in our society. We still have a long way to go to full acceptance, but progress is being made!

Those who are out and those who are coming out need allies, friends and family members who are accepting. Those of us who are straight allies need to continue working to create a world that is safe and accepting, loving toward those who are coming out.

Some of us are working to create a new PFLAG group which can help provide support to those who are coming out as well as to family and friends who have questions and worries and also need support.

Welcome, best wishes, and blessings to all who have come out today as well as to those who have come out before. It is a big step to come out, a step into a new reality. Even to come out in a safe place like this while remaining closeted in other parts of life is a big step. We support you, we accept you, we love you, and we will do our best to be there for you when you need friendship and support! You are welcome in this church and in every Unitarian Universalist church. May you always feel the support this community and other UU churches and people can offer!

Thank you to all who have shared their true selves with us today! Remember that not everyone who is out or coming out here may feel safe to be out in other places, and respect the privacy of those who have shared themselves this day.

May we each feel the safety to be our true selves here, gay or straight or whatever we are and whatever we believe, whomever we love, wherever we have been and wherever we hope to go in our life journeys! May this be a safe home for everyone who enters these doors and may we always provide encouragement for each other's journeys!

So may it always be! Amen!